

**SEMMES FAMILY PAPERS**  
**1861-1937**

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Accession Number: 86-020  
Date Completed: 2-13-86  
Location: VII-K-3  
Microfilm Accession Number: 1485

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Semmes Family Papers span the years 1861-1937, although most of the material is concentrated in the years 1861-1865. The bulk of the collection chronicles the service of Major Benedict Joseph Semmes as Chief Depot Commissary for the Army of Tennessee, CSA, between 1863-1865.

The collection occupies .42 cubic feet of shelf space, one box, and numbers approximately 150 items. Single photocopies of unpublished writings in the Semmes Family Papers may be made for the purposes of scholarly research.

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

## Raphael Semmes

- 1809      September 27, born in Charles County, Maryland, the son of Richard Thompson and Catherine (Middleton) Semmes
- 1826      April 1, appointed a midshipmen in the United States navy
- 1834      Admitted to the bar
- 1837      February 9, commissioned a Lieutenant in the Navy  
May 5, married Anne Elizabeth Spencer
- 1841      Made a survey of ship Island and the adjacent waters of Mississippi Sound
- 1846-1847      Service during the Mexican War with Major General Worth and later, General Winfield Scott
- 1847-1861      Served as Inspector of Provisions and clothing at Pensacola Navy Yard; court martial duty at Pensacola and at the Memphis Navy Yard  
Wrote two books: *Service Afloat and Ashore During the Mexican War* (1851)  
*The Campaign of General Scott in the Valley of Mexico* (1852)
- 1855      September 14, promoted to commander
- 1861      March 26, appointed a Commander in the Confederate States Navy
- 1861-1864      Commander of the Confederate commerce cruisers C. S. S. *Sumter* and C. S. S. *Alabama*, which preyed on the Union merchant vessels, taking many prizes and sinking at least 82 vessels
- 1865      February 10, promoted to Rear Admiral  
Participated in the capitulation of General Joseph E. Johnston at Greensboro, NC  
Paroled, rearrested and released
- 1869      Publisher *Memoirs of Service Afloat, or The Remarkable Career of the Confederate Cruisers Sumter and Alabama During the War Between the States*
- 1877      August 30, died at his home, Point Clear, Mobile, Alabama; buried in Mobile

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### Benedict Joseph Semmes

- 1823      June 15, born in Georgetown, D. C., the son of Raphael and Matilda (Jenkins) Semmes
- 1849      April 25, married Jorantha Jordan, daughter of Lawrence Pallette and Mary Ann (Lanckenau) Jordan
- bef. 1859    Followed mercantile pursuits in Washington, D. C.
- 1859      Removed to Memphis, Tennessee, and for years conducted a large and successful wholesale establishment
- 1862      March 8, enlisted as a sergeant in Co. L, 154 Tennessee Regiment  
            April 6, wounded at the Battle of Shiloh  
            September 1, commissioned a Captain of the Army of Tennessee
- 1863      Assigned to duty as Chief Depot Commissary
- 1865      February 5, promoted to Major  
            May 4, surrendered
- 1902      January 29, died at Memphis, Tennessee

*Source: Newman, Harry W., The Maryland Semmes and Kindred Families*

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Semmes Family Papers, containing approximately 150 items, span the years 1861-1937, although it is largely concentrated in the years 1861-1865. The collection consists of clippings, correspondence, military records, and printed materials.

The bulk of the collection is made up of military records of Captain and later, Major Benedict Joseph Semmes (1823-1902). Major Semmes was Chief Depot Commissary of the Army of Tennessee, CSA, 1863-1865. The military papers consists of accounts showing disbursements of subsistence funds for such purchases as beef cattle, sacks of corn and salt; for the expenses of the use of Negro laborers; and for driving, pasturing and forage for cattle. Circulars include schedules of rates to be charged for sales of subsistence stores to officers, formulas for the dispensing of rations, process for transfer of hides from slaughtered beef for purposes of tanning, etc.

Commissary returns list commissary items (beef, flour, rice, coffee, sugar, vinegar, candles, soap, etc.) issued to various company commanders during the Civil War. Correspondence is of a business nature (see Name Index). Instructions essentially concern the issuance of rations. Orders include such commissary subjects as directing that Semmes "not to impress any Negroes that are employed in agricultural pursuits;" issuance of lard in lieu of bacon, removal of surplus stores from combat zones; providing reports on amount of stores on hand; transfer of rations; seizure of corn owned by distillers and suppression of all distillers "in view of drunkenness resulting from this speculation," etc.

Other military records in the collection are reports, requisitions, schedules for prices for produce and army supplies secured through impressment and tables of rations.

The balance of the collection is made up of clippings (articles providing a biographical sketch of Admiral Raphael Semmes, 1809-1877, and the Confederate Navy commerce destroyers Alabama, Arkansas, Atlanta and Florida, correspondence (a photocopy of a letter, dated May 12, 1865, by Admiral Semmes to Captain Dunnington after the fall of Greensboro, North Carolina) and one printed material consisting of an act by the Congress of the Confederate States of America "To Reduce the Currency and to Authorize a New Issuance of Notes and Bonds."

## **Container List**

1. Clippings--"Admiral Raphael Semmes, a Noted Southerner"
2. Clippings--Confederate Navy--Alabama, Arkansas, Atlanta and Florida
3. Correspondence--Semmes, Raphael
4. Military Records--Accounts--Vouchers, etc., 1863-1864
5. Military Records--Circulars, 1862-1864
6. Military Records--Commissary--154th (Senior) Infantry, Tenn. Vol's, 1861-1862
7. Military Records--Correspondence--Brewer, S. B. - Walker, John
8. Military Records--Instructions-- Issuance of Rations, 1863
9. Military Records--Lists, 1863
10. Military Records--Orders, 1862-1864
11. Military Records--Reports, 1863
12. Military Records--Requisitions
13. Military Records--Schedules--Prices for produce and army supplies, 1864
14. Military Records--Tables--Ration, 1863
15. Printed Materials--Act--Confederate Congress, 1864

## NAME INDEX

This is a Name Index of correspondence in the Semmes Family Papers, together with the dates of the letters and information regarding their contents. The figures in parentheses denote the number of letters, if more than one. The last number refers to the folder in which the material is found.

Brewer, S. B. to Thad A. Cromwell, 1864, re: [copy]; reviewing regulations re losses that may occur on subsistence stores above ordinary waste, 7

Brewer, S. B. to P. L. Darling, 1863 and 1864, re: to receiving and receipting for subsistence stores, 7

Bulkley, H. D. (2) to B. J. Semmes, 1863, re: moving hogs to Winchester in advance of retreat; arrangement for shipping supplies to Chattanooga; invoices of hogs and beeves, 7

Burford (?), E. S. to [B. J. Semmes], 1863, re: request to buy subsistence stores for the use of his family, 7

Cummings, J. F. to B. J. Semmes, 1864, re: rice received in bad order, 7

Hillyer, Giles M. (3) to B. J. Semmes, 1863, re: rules on dispersal of subsistence stores to Division and Brigade commanders; supply depots, 7

Moore, W. E. to B. J. Semmes, 1864, re: movement of subsistence stores, 7

Schenck, I. (5) to B. J. Semmes, 1862-1863, re: various food supply matters, 7

Semmes, Raphael to Capt. Dunnington, May 12, [1865], re: anxious to see a friend; instructions on where to meet, 3

Walker, John J. (8) to B. J. Semmes, 1863, re: arrangements for sending supplies by wagons to army encamped at Winchester; grinding of corn meal; unable to provide [work] details for staff service; buy all whiskey available; [corn] meal more important than whiskey; must send two carloads of meal daily; urges facilities of transport for army needs, 7